

'ACT NOW'

PRIME MINISTER SHEHBAZ SHARIF ADDRESS TO THE 77TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY – KEY TAKEAWAYS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



“I stand here today to tell the story of my country Pakistan...”

Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif addressed the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York on September 23rd, 2022. While addressing the global powers at the UNGA session Prime Minister Sharif laid strong arguments on multiple issues of importance to Pakistan and the world. At the outset of his speech, he highlighted the plight of 33 million people Pakistanis who have suffered irrevocably due to the devastation caused by floods. In his 24 minutes he presented Pakistan’s perspective on the global and regional crisis; threats of climate change; global conflicts; solution to the long-standing Kashmir and Palestine conflict; sustainability in peace in South Asia; Pakistan's contribution to counter-terrorism; Islamophobia; and peaceful resolution to conflicts around the globe.

PM Sharif, in detail, touched upon the real threat of climate change and the lack of seriousness at the regional and global levels to mitigate its effects. He stressed on the alarming anti-Muslim trends in India and the indifference of Indian authorities to control the rise of Islamophobia while chanting the Hindutva ideology. In his speech, he also laid down multiple progressive ideas and solutions to crisis management

Following are the key takeaways;

Biblical floods and Devastation:

The scale and magnitude of the carnage caused by the floods have pushed Pakistan back a decade. The constant down of the rain has pushed one-third of Pakistan underwater. Pakistan is facing unprecedented challenges in curbing the damage caused by the natural disaster; it has not only laid havoc and destroyed lives, but it has also equally caused unparalleled damage to the livelihoods of the population affected, and infrastructure across provinces.

Pakistan has become ground zero for climate change and is at the risk of health hazards in a post-flood scenario with women, children and men alike faced with the risk of diseases due to stagnation of water. The damage to infrastructure, especially roads has also rendered the supply of food and impeded the affectees to flee to safer areas. It has also compromised the delivery of aid to people in need. Approximately 13,000 kilometers of roads have been damaged, over 370 bridges have been swept away, a million homes destroyed and another million damaged, a million farm animals and livestock killed, and 4 million acres of crops washed.

The calamity Pakistan is facing has not been triggered by Pakistan. With relentless monsoon spells, Glacier melt and excruciating heat waves, Pakistan has become the hotbed of the climate change crisis. Pakistan falls in the 10 most climate vulnerable list of countries but emits less than one per cent of the greenhouse gases.

The suffering of Pakistan is metastasized due to global inaction. Pakistan has mobilized all available resources towards the relief efforts. It has repurposed budget priorities as well as has conducted millions of cash transfers under the Benazir Income Support Program.

- The leaders of the world should come together to act and act now on an agreed common agenda for the common well-being and act responsibly towards countries that suffer as a consequence of their choices.
- Approximation of justice for the loss and damage and building back with resilience and strength should be considered a collective responsibility of the international community towards countries who contribute the least to global warming.
- The time for talk about action has passed and there is a pressing need to act more.

Sustainable Peace and Stability in South Asia:

To ensure a stable internal environment Pakistan needs a stable external environment. Pakistan wants to be a partner in peace within its neighborhood and beyond. However, sustainable peace and stability in South Asia remain dependent on multiple issues.

- Kashmir: Jammu and Kashmir dispute is increasingly becoming a core ingredient of the quarrel between Islamabad and New Delhi. The illegal and unilateral actions of 5th August 2019 by India have further reinforced its incessant denial of the Kashmiri people to self-determination with designs to alter the demographic structure of the occupied territory. The valley of Kashmir has become the most militarized zone in the world as New Delhi ramps up its military deployments in and around occupied Jammu and Kashmir with 900,000 troops. The valley has become a land with no law and conscience as brutalization, extrajudicial killings, incarceration, and torture of Kashmiris have become a norm. Moreover,
- India is seeking to turn the Muslim majority of Jammu and Kashmir into Hindu territory through illegal demographic changes.
- Two and a half million non-Kashmiri illegal voters have been fraudulently registered in blatant violation of Security Councils resolutions and international law particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention.
- Constructive Engagement: Pakistan remains consistent in its commitment to peace in South Asia; however, it cannot be achieved alone. India must take credible steps to create enabling an environment for constructive engagement. Priorities need to be set straight in choosing a peaceful South Asia as wars and conflict will only encourage misery, poverty, and unemployment across both.
- Perils of Arms Race: Pakistan repeatedly pronounced the negative impact of the arms race in the region. It's high time that New Delhi recognizes the message and understands the risks involved. Both the countries are armed to the teeth and war is not an option. It is high time that the resources used on arms be directed toward promoting education, health and employment.
- Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts: Peaceful dialogue for conflict resolution is important to minimize losses. Dialogues and discussions can resolve issues on multiple fronts not just in the region but across the globe.

Afghanistan Situation; a Collective Responsibility:

Pakistan has a vital stake in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Post US withdrawal Afghanistan presents a unique challenge for the world. The country is without a functional economy and banking system. Pakistan wants a stable Afghanistan in its west one that respects and nurtures all its citizens without regard to gender ethnicity and religion.

Pakistan has been at the forefront of leading humanitarian efforts to help the country and pleads the case to help Afghanistan to avoid another civil war, rise in terrorism, drug trafficking and the influx of new refugees which none of Afghanistan's neighbours is in a position to accommodate.

- Pakistan encourages and supports the rights of girls and women to education and work.
- Isolating the Afghan interim government could aggravate the suffering of the Afghan people who are already destitute
- Constructive engagement and economic support are more likely to secure a positive response to a peaceful prosperous and connected Afghanistan
- Pakistan urges the International Community to respond in a positive way to the UN appeal for \$4.2 billion in humanitarian and economic assistance to Afghanistan's release of its financial reserves essential to revive its banking system.

Pakistan shares the key concern of the International Community regarding the threat posed by the major terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan such as Al-Qaeda, ETIM and IMU. Countering terrorism is a collective responsibility and should be dealt with effectively and comprehensively.

Terrorism:

Pakistan has been the principal victim of terrorism due to its role as the front-line state in the Global War on Terror (GWOt). It has suffered more than any other country involved with 80,000 casualties and over \$150 billion in economic loss. Being a victim of the menace of terrorism, Pakistan strongly condemns terrorism in all its forms and shades and manifestations.

- The doctrine of terrorism is nourished by poverty, unemployment, deprivation, injustice and ignorance fanned by vested interest and not religion.
- Pakistan remains a victim of terrorist attacks from across its borders sponsored and financed by its regional adversary.
- The contributions and sacrifices as well as the successful defeat of terrorist outfits inside its border remain unprecedented in contemporary history.

Islamophobia:

Islamophobia has become a widespread phenomenon since 9/11. In recent times Islamophobia has become a policy tool for many nations and has escalated to epidemic proportions. Countries such as India are engaging in using oppression of minorities as state-sponsored political policies. Currently, millions of Muslims in India are living in the worst manifestations of Islamophobia whilst subjected to discriminated laws and policies. Similarly, hijab bans, attacks on mosques, lynching by Hindu mobs, and calls for genocide against Indian Muslims by extremist groups have become a norm.

- To overcome this challenge, UNGA adopted a landmark resolution introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the OIC to designate 15th March as the International Day to combat Islamophobia.
- In addition, concrete measures by the UN and member states must be taken to combat Islamophobia and promote interfaith harmony.

Peaceful Conflict Resolution:

Pakistan has always been a proponent of peaceful conflict resolution. The world is becoming increasingly complex with active conflict zones on almost every continent. The Security Council must play its respective role under the UN Charter to curb conflicts. Pakistan supports all possible efforts to promote peaceful resolutions.

- The Security Council must be expanded by adding 11 new non-permanent members to make it more representative.
- New permanent members will pass democratic, transparent, and effective accountability whilst paralyzing the council's biased decision making, enlarging representational deficit and creating new centers of privilege in violation of the principle of sovereign equality of member states.
- The world must come together to solve conflicts across the Middle East including in Syria and Yemen, restore peace in Europe and Asia, and resolve festering conflicts across the world.
- Similarly, the blatant use of force and flagrant violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people and the desecration of the Holy Al-Aksa mosque by Israel must be brought to an end. A viable independent and contiguous Palestinian state with the pre-1967 borders al-Sharif as its capital must be considered the most comprehensive and Lasting solution to the Palestinian conflict.

Partner for Peace:

Pakistan is a partner for peace and is against subjugating communities and freedom of existence and rights. Long-lasting peace in the region can only be ensured and guaranteed through a just solution to the Kashmir conflict by providing rights to Kashmiri under the UN Charter. Pakistan has always welcomed peaceful resolutions and conflict management with its counterparts in India.

While concluding PM Sharif stressed that developing countries like Pakistan and others must find their place amongst the constellations of nations and spend resources wisely on developing societies, and building structures to overcome challenges and calamities. Resources are not unlimited, hence, must be deployed for the collective well-being of the people, for children, empowerment, health and education. Moving forward it's a collective responsibility of the world as part of the UN to restore its Charter and principles, to restore the vision of the UN and equip it with the capacity to preserve and promote global peace and prosperity.